

Executive Summary: Scoping Report for the Agua Fria National Monument/ Bradshaw-Harquahala Planning Areas

Introduction

The Scoping Report for the Agua Fria National Monument/Bradshaw-Harquahala Planning Areas documents the public scoping process of the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Phoenix Field Office (PFO) Resource Management Plans (RMPs) for the Agua Fria National Monument and Bradshaw-Harquahala planning areas. These RMPs will be published in conjunction with a combined Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for both planning areas.

The scoping report includes a description of BLM's scoping process, an overview of the planning schedule, and an analysis of comments received. Comments from the public, agencies, tribal governments and all other interested groups are represented, along with BLM management concerns, to identify issues important to the future management of public lands. These issues will guide development of alternatives to be analyzed in the EIS and ultimately guide development of both RMPs.

Plan Overview

The two planning areas encompass more than 3,000,000 acres. BLM-managed lands within these planning boundaries comprise approximately 967,000 acres, including the entire 71,100 acres of the Agua Fria National Monument.

The Agua Fria National Monument was created on January 11, 2000, with the signing by the President of Proclamation 7263. As a result of its designation as a National Monument, it now requires a separate RMP. The Bradshaw-Harquahala planning area includes land within the Black Canyon corridor, the Lake Pleasant area, the Wickenburg area, Congress/Yarnell, Buckeye, and western areas of unincorporated Maricopa County. The PFO currently manages resources for the Bradshaw-Harquahala area under two Land Use Plans (LUPs): the 1988 Phoenix Resource Management Plan and the 1983 Lower Gila North Management Framework Plan.

Scoping Process

The formal scoping process began on April 24, 2002 with the publication of a Notice of Intent (NOI) in the *Federal Register*. The NOI initiated solicitation for public comment. A total of 10 public scoping meetings were held during the scoping period.

Public meetings were advertised by a variety of methods. Volume 1 of the "Arizona Planning Bulletin for the Agua Fria National Monument Plan and Bradshaw-Harquahala Management Plan Revision," available in both English and Spanish, was distributed to a mailing list of more than 1,700 individuals and organizations. The bulletin included a statement of the purpose and need for the project, a description of

the public scoping process, information about upcoming meeting times and locations, and stamped, pre-addressed “planning worksheets” for each planning area. Interested parties were encouraged to complete these questionnaires and submit them to BLM to make their concerns known. The public was also invited to submit comments via e-mail or to visit the PFO in person to review comments received to date.

Legal notices of the public scoping meetings were published, as required, in six newspapers in the geographic area of the planning efforts. Flyers were prepared in both English and Spanish versions and distributed throughout the planning areas, and a press release was prepared and distributed to hundreds of media outlets throughout Arizona.

The scoping meetings provided an opportunity for the public to receive information, ask questions, and provide input into BLM’s planning effort for the two planning areas. Informative brochures and fact sheets were available to meeting attendees, and planning area maps delineating current land uses were displayed at each meeting. Discussions covered plan development and environmental review processes, in addition to relevant timelines. All comments were transcribed onto a flip chart during the meeting and were recorded via tape recorder.

Collaborative Planning Process

BLM PFO contracted with James Kent Associates (JKA) to work with residents and community groups in the planning areas regarding their issues and concerns. JKA staff visited the communities of Wickenburg, Yarnell, Buckeye, Tonopah, Castle Hot Springs, New River, Black Canyon City, Cordes Junction, Mayer, Dewey, Humboldt, and Prescott Valley. They have also been in Phoenix, Flagstaff and Prescott, talking with environmental and recreation groups. Citizens have discussed their concerns with BLM land use management in their areas, as well as suggested ideas for improving current land management practices. Residents in some areas have even conducted community surveys in order to provide input and guidance to BLM in the planning process.

BLM has also focused on internally identifying management concerns and on reviewing their own policies and goals, and contracted with the consulting firm of Jones & Stokes to collect data, conduct meetings, and facilitate the planning process as required by the National Environmental Policy Act.

In the coming months, BLM will conduct workshops in a number of communities to develop alternatives for analysis in the EIS process. Alternatives must reflect citizen interests as well as agency concerns to evaluate how land use decisions will be made in the future. Citizens are encouraged to participate throughout this process.

Cooperating Agencies and Agency Coordination

The PFO held a cooperating agency workshop on October 30th, 2002 to enable potential cooperators to meet each other, discuss BLM’s planning process and the meaning of cooperating agency status, and begin developing the Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) that are required for entities to become formal cooperators in BLM’s planning process.

BLM is currently working with the Arizona State Land Department, Arizona Department of Transportation, Arizona Game and Fish Department, Maricopa County, Yavapai County, City of Phoenix, City of Peoria, and Town of Wickenburg to establish cooperating agency status agreements.

Additionally, Tonto National Forest and Prescott National Forest are working together to develop a joint MOU. A cooperating agency status agreement template has been sent to some agencies that have not yet replied.

Agencies were given the opportunity to comment as part of the scoping process. On December 19, 2002, a meeting was held in Phoenix to review the planning process and answer questions of agencies. Representatives from a total of 14 coordinating agencies were present. All agencies were encouraged to provide written comments by the December 30, 2002 deadline. The concerns of responding agencies were then entered into the administrative record and incorporated into the scoping report.

Tribal Consultations

The PFO sent letters on May 10, 2002, to initiate the tribal consultation process with tribes who have oral traditions or cultural concerns relating to the planning areas, or who are documented to have occupied or used them during historic times. These tribes include: the Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation, the Yavapai-Prescott Tribe, the Yavapai-Apache Indian Community (Camp Verde), the Hopi Tribe, the Gila River Community, the Colorado River Indian Tribes, the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community, the Ak-Chin Indian Community, the Tohono O'odham Nation, and the Fort Mojave Indian Tribe. Several interactions with tribal members have been made to solicit comments with regards to the BLM's planning effort. BLM will continue to consult with Indian tribes throughout the planning process.

Collection of Comments

All scoping comments for the two planning areas were received or postmarked by November 15, 2002. BLM received 364 comments recorded from the public meetings and more than 900 written submissions of comments containing a total of 2,712 individual written comments. Of the total 3,076 comments received throughout the scoping process, 38% came in the form of completed planning worksheets, 15% as letters, 12% as oral comments recorded on meeting flip charts, 20% as emails, and 15% that were recorded as "other." The "other" category included signed petitions as well as formatted template letters from organized stakeholder groups.

Results of Comments

All comments received for this scoping effort were assigned, based on content, to one of 12 designated issue categories. Comments were further divided into various sub-issues within each category. All comments were read, evaluated, and manually entered into an analytic database.

In an effort to relate the analysis and discussion of issues to the community level, the planning areas were divided into six community areas: Phoenix, Buckeye, Wickenburg–Yarnell–Castle Hot Springs, Prescott–Prescott Valley–Chino Valley, Black Canyon City–New River, and Dewey–Humboldt–Spring Valley.

Analysis by specific community area of the comments received led to identification and ranking of the issues of primary concern for each area. These results are presented in tabular form in the scoping report.

Figures 1 and 2 below depict the most frequently mentioned issues for each planning area.

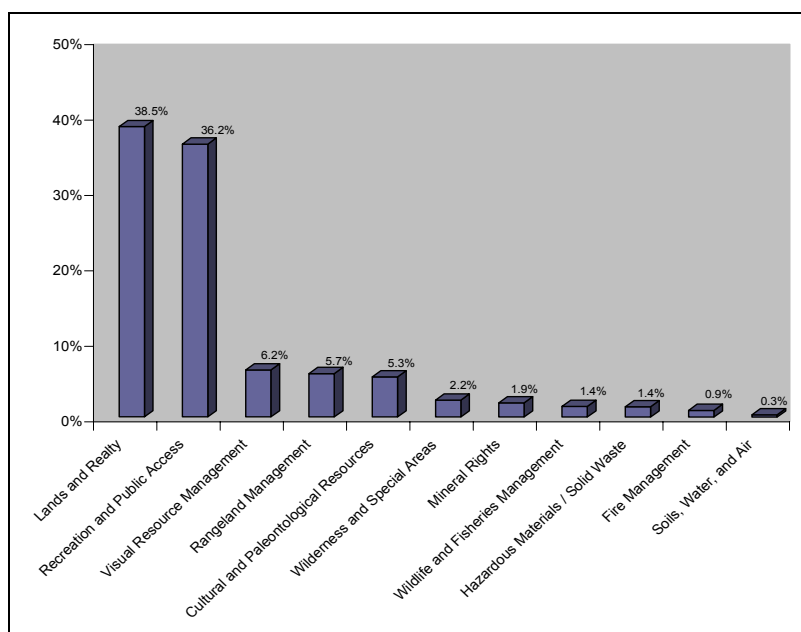


Figure 1. Public Response by Issue – Bradshaw-Harquahala Planning Area

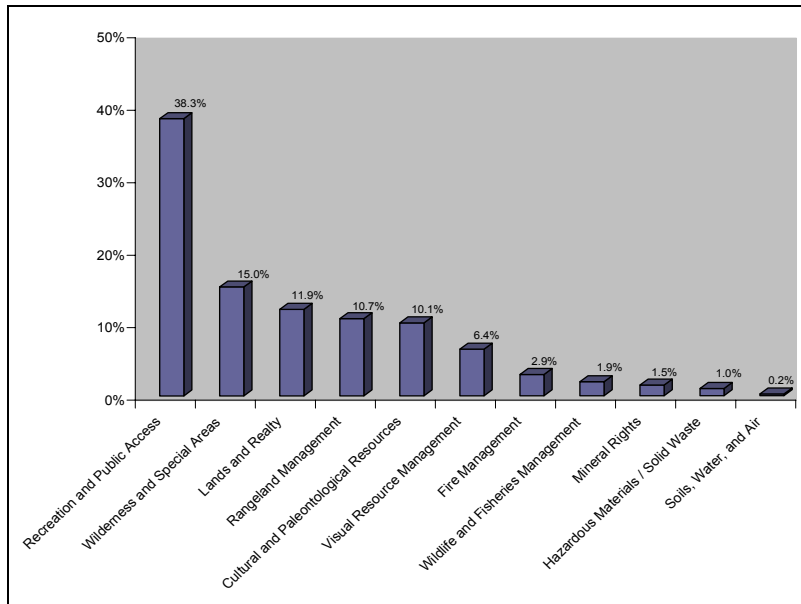


Figure 2. Public Response by Issue – Agua Fria National Monument Planning Area

A complete copy of the Scoping Report for the Agua Fria National Monument and Bradshaw-Harquahala planning areas is available on the BLM PFO's planning website at www.az.blm.gov.